

# THEOLOGICAL QUARTERLY.

VOL. XII.

JANUARY, 1908.

No. 1.

## CORDATUS' CONTROVERSY WITH MELANCHTHON.

(Continued.)

The letter announcing Cordatus' intention to come to Wittenberg for a personal interview had barely reached Cruciger when Cordatus himself made his appearance (September 18th). He had arrived the day before and wasted no time by delay. It was still early in the morning—seven o'clock—when he knocked at Cruciger's door. The two men remained closeted in strict privacy for quite a while. There is no record of their discussion. The ancient chronicler sums up the affair with the summary statement: *diu litigatum est*. However, the interview yielded one result that is of almost dramatic effect, and this the chronicler has recorded, because it gave a new turn to the controversy. It appears that Cruciger, also in this personal interview, denied having spoken or dictated the words which Cordatus claimed he had. But Cordatus was able to place before him the exact statements as they had been taken down by the students in Cruciger's lecture on July 24th. The evidence was conclusive, and was met by Cruciger in a manner that is anything rather than manly. He replied that *the statements which he had dictated were the product of Dr. Philip*, that he had been Philip's pupil in this matter and had been misled by Philip, in a way that he could not explain. (C. R. 3, 161.) Thus Cruciger took shelter behind his greater colleague and left the latter to face the issue of Cordatus alone.

From this juncture Cruciger disappears as public actor in the controversy. Cruciger's startling revelation had been a vir-

## JOHN WICLIF.

## V. THOUGH DEAD, YET SPEAKING.

F. D. Matthew says, "Wiclif was no religious genius like Luther," and, "He lacked that strong personal stamp which wins our regard for Luther." Yet he was the scourge of imposture, the ponderous hammer which smote the brazen idolatry of his age. The grand old man, the illustrious pioneer of reform in England, stands out in solitary and mysterious loneliness, and through the haze of six long centuries his dim image looks down like the portrait of the first of a long line of kings, without personality or expression, yet from the quarries of history we can gather enough stones to make a mosaic of him.

Wiclif had a tall, spare figure, sharply-cut features, firm-set lips, a piercing eye, a flowing, grizzled beard, a thoughtful, earnest, dignified presence, a charming manner; he was a bright and pleasant companion in everyday life and at table, and the highest ranks delighted in his society, owing to his wit, humor, and sarcasm; he had fervent and unfeigned piety, moral energy, and intellectual fearlessness, and led a blameless life; never very strong in body, he yet wrote about ninety-six works in Latin and about sixty-five in English.

Wiclif was a brilliant Oxford professor and a humble parish priest; a theologian and a philosopher; a religious reformer and a political economist; a translator of the Bible and a practical trainer of priests; a caustic critic and a successful organizer; an orator and an author; a hard-hitting polemic and a gentle Gospel preacher; a man of the court and a man of the people; a master of books and a leader of men; a Latin scholastic and an English pamphleteer; the last of the Schoolmen and the first of the Reformers; a student of the past and a builder for the future; a vigorous assailant of abuses and an unerring searcher for the seat of trouble; a man of fierce invective and of deep sympathy; a dry logic chopper and the master of picturesque, idiomatic, strong, nervous, and racy English; a polished man of the world and a humble and sin-

cere Christian, who lost in his life and triumphed after his death.

Wm. Thorpe, examined for heresy before Archbishop Arundel, said, "Master John Wiclif was considered by many to be the most holy of all men in his age. He was of emaciated frame, spare, and well-nigh destitute of strength; and he was absolutely blameless in his conduct. Wherefore many of the chief men of this kingdom, who frequently held counsel with him, kept a record of what he said, and guided themselves after his manner of life."

Twenty-two years after his death, Wiclif's Alma Mater bore him testimony as follows:—"With one heart, voice, and testimony we witness all his conduct throughout his whole life to have been praiseworthy; whose honest manners, profound scholarship, and redolent fame and sweetness we earnestly desire to be known to all the faithful; for we hold his ripe conversation and assiduous labors to tend to the praise of God, the salvation of others, and the benefit of the Church. We therefore signify unto you by these presents that his conversation, from tender years up to the time of his death, was so excellent and honest, that never was there any annoyance or sinister suspicion or infamy reported of him; but in answering, reading, preaching, he behaved himself laudably, as a strong champion of the faith, vanquishing those who by voluntary beggary blasphemed Christ's religion, by Catholic sentences out of Holy Scripture. Nor was the aforesaid doctor convicted of heresy, nor burned of our prelates after burial. God forbid that by our prelates a man of such probity should be condemned for a heretic, who wrote in logic, philosophy, divinity, morality, and the speculative sciences without his peer, as we believe, in all our University."

Carping critics find fault with Wiclif's rude speech. To be sure, he handled the pope and the corruptions of the church without gloves. His denunciations are indeed fearful. But sledge-hammers, battering-rams, and earthquakes were needed to rouse men out of their stupor. Men like Wiclif and Luther

knew what they were talking about, likewise they knew how to talk; their critics living four and five hundred years later know neither the one nor the other.

Matthew says: "One of Wiclif's most marked characteristics is his essential moderation." Wiclif prayed for grace to avoid harsh language. Dr. James says: "Wiclif notes abuses in general, he never names any one of his adversaries, monk or friar." Wiclif's violence of language against the corrupt clergy is matched by the poet Gower and even Bishop Brunton of Rochester. The worldly-wise Chaucer and the enthusiastic Catholic Langland hated indulgences with intellectual scorn and moral indignation as well as the serious and spiritual Wiclif.

His austere exemplary life has defied even calumny: his vigorous, incessant efforts to reduce the whole clergy to primitive poverty have provoked no retort as to his own pride, self-interest, indulgence, inconsistent with his earnest severity, says Milman (*Latin Christ.*, Bk. 13, chap. 6).

Dr. Shirley says, "Wiclif possessed, as few ever did, the qualities which give men power over their fellows. His enemies ascribed this power to the magic of an ascetic habit; the fact remains engraven upon every line of his face." Other enemies attributed his alleged errors to his subtlety of mind and extraordinary learning, pride of intellect and desire for distinction. Still others say that the corruptions of Rome had much to do with Wiclif's success.

After Wiclif's death the Pope was petitioned to order the heretic's body to be taken out of consecrated ground and buried in a dunghill. It is a pleasure to say to the Pope's honor that he refused to do so, as later on Charles V honorably refused to have Luther's bones disturbed, nobly saying, "I war with the living, not with the dead." In 1397, Archbishop Arundel presided over a Synod that condemned eighteen of Wiclif's conclusions; in 1409, an Oxford committee condemned two hundred and sixty-seven of his errors and burned his books at Carfax; in 1410, a papal bull against Wiclif was published in Bohemia, seventeen of his works were condemned and two

hundred copies burned; in 1413, Wiclif's books were burned by the Council of Rome; in 1415, the Council of Constance, which burned John Hus and Jerome of Prague, formally condemned Wiclif's writings, and ordered his books and bones burned; in 1423, the Council of Pavia condemned Wiclif; in 1428, Richard Flemmyng, a former disciple of Wiclif and now Bishop of Lincoln, carried out the decree of Pope Martin V and threw Wiclif's ashes into the little river Swift, "which runneth hard by his church at Lutterworth," saying, "That is the end of him!"

But that was *not* the last of him; for old Thomas Fuller says truly: "The Swift did convey his ashes into Avon, Avon into Severn, Severn into the narrow sea, and this into the wide ocean. And so the ashes of Wiclif are the emblem of his doctrine, which is now dispersed all the world over."

The Avon to the Severn runs,  
The Severn to the sea,  
And Wiclif's dust shall spread abroad  
Wide as the waters be.

Wordsworth in his *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* XVII expands the thought:—

Once more the Church is seized with sudden fear,  
And at her call is Wiclif disinhumed:  
Yea, his dry bones to ashes are consumed,  
And flung into the brook that travels near;  
Forthwith that ancient voice that streams can hear  
Thus speaks (that voice that walks upon the wind,  
Though seldom heard by busy human kind):  
As thou these ashes, little brook, wilt bear  
Into the Avon—Avon to the tide  
Of Severn—Severn to the narrow seas—  
Into the main ocean they,—this deed accurst,  
An emblem yields to friends and enemies,  
How the bold teacher's doctrine, sanctified  
By truth, shall spread throughout the world dispersed.

It was easy to burn the bones and the books of Wiclif; it was not so easy to destroy his doctrine. Flemmyng himself founded Lincoln College for the express purpose of opposing Wiclifism. William of Wykeham, Wiclif's opponent, on

April 13, 1386, consecrated "St. Mary's College of Winchester in Oxford," now New College, and not long after he was reproached by the courtiers with having raised up "a seminary of heresy." Archbishop Arundel in a letter to the Chancellor of Oxford complained "that almost the whole University was affected by heretical pravity."

The truth could not be crushed to earth by building colleges, so force was tried. In 1401 they passed the notorious statute "De Haeretico Comburendo," to burn heretics, and William Sawtre was the first victim, and the good Lord Cobham the most illustrious.

The marriage of King Richard II with Anne of Luxemburg, daughter of the German Emperor Charles IV, and sister of King Wenceslaus of Bohemia, brought the two countries close together, and students from both studied at Oxford and Prague. We know that Nicholas Faulfisch carried Wiclif's works to Bohemia. Jerome, a young knight of Prague, the friend of Hus, studied at Oxford and became an enthusiastic disciple of Wiclif. "Until now," he said, "we had nothing but the shell of science: Wiclif first laid open the kernel." Thus the philosophical and theological works of Wiclif came under the eyes of John Hus and mastered him wholly: "I am drawn to them," he said, "by the manner in which they strive to lead all men back to Christ." Hus himself declares, in a paper written about 1411, that for thirty years writings of Wiclif were read at Prague, and that he himself had been in the habit of reading them for more than twenty years. (*Neander Hist. Ch.* V, p. 242.)

For many decades in Bohemia Wiclif was "the fifth evangelist," says Loserth. Refusing to condemn Wiclif, heroic Hus said, "I am content that my soul should be where his soul is."

"Hus was not merely much influenced, but absolutely dominated by these ideas. Recent investigations have furnished incontestable evidence that, in the matter of doctrine, Hus owed everything to Wiclif." So says Prof. Ludwig Pastor in his "History of the Popes," recommended by Leo XIII.

As late as the middle of the fifteenth century Chancellor Gascoigne of Oxford still cursed Wiclif "of thrice-damned memory." Wiclif's doctrines lived here and there until their faint streaks were swallowed up in the dawning glory of Luther's reformation, until the pale morning star was displaced by the dazzling sun.

In 1530 Henry VIII sent to Oxford for Wiclif's "thrice-damned" "Articles;" the University solemnly sent them, and the King warmly thanked it for doing so, and with Wiclif's articles King Henry went on "to vex the Pope . . . by promoting Wycleve's doctrine and ejecting Papacy out of his kingdom."

Fuller is right when he says of Wiclif's followers: "These men were sentinels against an army of enemies till God sent Luther to relieve them." "I am assured that the truth of the Gospel may indeed for a time be cast down in particular places, and may for a while abide in silence; but extinguished it never can be. For the Truth itself has said: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my Word shall never pass away.'"

Milwaukee, Wis.

W. DALLMANN.

---